Subj: Submission regarding pending legislation regarding the Death Master File (DMF)
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I have been a serious amateur genealogist for over 15 years, researching my Shenton ancestors and all who bear the Shenton surname. While I am not a professional genealogist, I am a member of a local genealogical society, have been a member of several societies in areas where my ancestors lived, actively maintain several different web sites specifically focused on various aspects of my research, and correspond regularly with dozens of like-minded researchers and people newly interested in learning about their family history.

Many people new to genealogy and family history have been spurred in their interest by current television series such as the popular 'How Do You Think You Are'. When they first start out on their searches, one of the earliest sources they find is the Social Security Death Index (SSDI), the commercial version of the Death Master File (DMF). One of the basic principles taught to 'newbies' is to 'start with what you know, and work backwards'. Obviously, what people know best is their immediate family – parents and grandparents. And the best sources for information on parents and grandparents, which usually leads to information on earlier ancestors, is the Census and the SSDI.

It would be a major disservice to 'newbies' and to all researchers to remove the SSDI from public access or severely reduce the amount of available information. I can certainly understand the concerns about the SSDI – both as they relate to the possibility of its use for fraudulent tax filings, and to inadvertent posting of erroneous death information. However I have been, in both my professional career and personal life, heavily involved in the use and development of computer systems, and both issues (tax and privacy) appear to be obvious applications for improved computer technology:

- The Internal Revenue Service, with modest improvements in computer programs, internal work procedures, and – if necessary – additional legislation, should be able to utilize the DMF/SSDI to detect and stop virtually all fraudulent use of Social Security Numbers, wherever they might have been obtained.
- The Social Security Administration, also with modest improvements in computer programs, internal work procedures, and – if necessary – additional legislation should be able to significantly reduce the already minor error rate of invalid entries in the DMF/SSDI.

Given such successful reduction of the opportunity for fraud and error, additional consideration should be given to the fundamental issue of identity theft, whether against the IRS or private citizens, and making the definition of such criminal activities more clear and with more explicit penalties.

In short, please consider addressing targeted solutions (better computer processing, better work procedures, and – if necessary – specific legislation) instead of the shotgun approach of information suppression.